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Spy Agency Infighting Hurt U.S., Turner Says

Ex-CIA Director Critical of Rise in Covert Actions

By Charles R. Babcock
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Former CIA director Stansfield Turner, who ran the agency during the Carter administration, describes the U.S. intelligence agencies in a new book as being plagued by bureaucratic infighting that harmed the nation.

In the 285-page book, "Secrecy and Democracy, the CIA in Transition," excerpts of which are being published this week in Newsweek magazine, Turner also is critical of the Reagan administration for its increased use of covert action around the world and for what he describes as its attempt to censor his book by making more than 100 deletions of material it termed classified.

In one instance of infighting, Turner wrote, Navy Vice Adm. Bobby Ray Inman, while head of the National Security Agency (NSA), withheld from the Central Intelligence Agency important information about the Soviet Navy. Inman did so on grounds that the information was "tactical" rather than "national" intelligence, according to Turner. "This, of course, was a bureaucratic ruse, and the loser was the United States," Turner wrote.

In another instance, he said, the NSA and the CIA's clandestine service resisted and defied a presidential directive to institute a simplified code-word classification system Turner had inititated.

Turner also said that Defense Intelligence Agency officials were pressured to produce reports that supported defense programs. The tug-of-war extended to the White House, he said, where officials put pressure on the CIA to produce reports that would help the president politically.

President Jimmy Carter's White House "was repeatedly insensitive . . . to the importance of protecting the apolitical credibility of intelligence," he wrote. National security affairs adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski once asked Turner to declassify information on the Middle East that would help Carter, he said.

Of the Reagan administration, Turner said its model of intelligence seemed to be the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), where current CIA Director William J. Casey worked during World War II. "Almost any covert action to help win the war was considered acceptable, and the more the better," he wrote. "Translating that attitude to the peacetime conditions of the 1980s was a serious mistake."

Turner acknowledged that the Carter administration used covert action, too. By the end of Carter's term, he said, a "wide variety of covert operations were in place" because of the administration's "cumulative frustration" about Soviet adventurism in Africa and Afghanistan, the fall of the shah of Iran and the taking of American hostages there.

He saved his harshest words for what he called the Reagan administration's tardy and arbitrary efforts to censor his book. He said it took more than 18 months to get the manuscript cleared. He complained that the CIA made only three concessions on more than 100 deletions its reviewers required on security grounds. He also said the agency threatened him with legal action if he published the disputed information.

Turner, a former admiral, said his attorney had requested reasons for some of the deletions, which he said ranged from "borderline issues to the ridiculous," or that a court injunction be filed against him so a judge could resolve the dispute.

The agency's "irresponsible" response, he said, was that he should do whatever seemed "appropriate," but the agency reserved the right "to take whatever action it deemed appropriate."

"Clearly the Reagan administration does not understand that oversight of intelligence in our society includes constructive criticism from constructive outsiders like me," he said.

CIA spokesman George Lauder said that Turner's charges "have no validity." He said Turner's manuscript was subjected to the same review other authors receive.

"In this instance," Lauder said, "the review process proved to be more lengthy than in almost all cases in recent years: Adm. Turner submitted his manuscript chapter by chapter, he continually revised portions that had already been approved, and we accommodated him in that process."

Turner—a controversial director because of his emphasis on technical collection systems over spies and his decision to cut 820 positions from the CIA's clandestine service in 1977—defended his tenure.

"We must never allow the Soviets to counter our technical-collection capabilities," he said. "We have grown utterly dependent on them, and in many applications no amount of human spying can possibly be a substitute."

Turner said the intelligence agencies' mishandling of a report that there was a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba was more damaging than their failure to predict the fall of the shah of Iran. Earlier warning of the Islamic revolution would not have saved the shah, he said, but negative publicity over the Soviet brigade played a direct role in killing ratification of the SALT II arms control treaty. It turned out that the "brigade" had been in Cuba for nearly 20 years.

Turner's frustrations at trying to control the various intelligence agencies are illustrated by his efforts, at Carter's request, to get satellite photographs of a war between two small, unidentified countries.

It took more than a month before satellites located the war. An embarrassed Turner, meanwhile, commissioned the CIA's clandestine service to hire a plane to fly over and take pictures. The plane crashed in a yam patch, leaving the agency with a $2 million indemnification bill.

Turner said he found out later that ar aggressive U.S. military attache, who dic not know of the president's request, hac taken aerial photos of the war. But the pho tos were filed away by the Defense Intel ligence Agency because the attache had ha second thoughts about his authority to tak them.

"The whole experience humbled me Turner wrote. "It left me wondering wha kind of team I was leading. Here I was, hea of the whole intelligence community of th United States, and I couldn't produce a fe pictures of a Mickey Mouse war."

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